

Reformation of Manners, the true way of
Honouring God. With the necessity of
putting the Laws in Execution against
Vice and Profaneness.

IN A

Pamphlet Collection
Duke Divinity School

SERMON

Preach'd at

WHITE-HALL.

1 Samuel 2. 30.

*For them that honour me I will honour; and they that
despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*

By the late Right Reverend Father in GOD,
EDWARD STILLINGFLEET Lord Bishop
of Worcester.

And Published by their MAJESTIES Special Command.

L O N D O N:

Printed and Sold by *H. Hills*, in *Black-fryars*,
near the *Water-side*, For the Benefit of the Poor.

1 Samuel 2. 30.

For them that honour me I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

THese Words were spoken by a *Prophet* of the Lord to *Eli*, at that time, the *Higb-Priest* and *Judge* over *Israel*, upon Occasion of the Wickedness of his Sons, and the *dishonour* brought upon Religion thereby; which was so great that it is said, *they made the People abhor the Offering of the Lord*. v. 17. But that we may the better comprehend their Scope and Design, there are some remarkable particulars to be considered; with respect to the Circumstances that attend them.

(1) That their Sins were of a high and scandalous Nature, being an open Affront both to the Ceremonial and moral Law. *The Offering of the Lord* was that which himself had appointed in the Law of *Moses*; wherein it was expressly required, that the *Fat of the Sacrifices* of Peace-Offerings must be burnt upon the *Alter* Lev. 7. 31. and after that, the *Joints* were to be divided, and the *Priest* was to have his share, and the *People* that offer'd them the rest. v. 33, 34. But these Sons of *Eli* thought themselves too great to be tied up to such a strict observance of the Niceties of the Law; and therefore they sent their Servants to demand what they pleased, without any Regard to that Order which the Laws appointed. v. 13, 14, 15, 16. It is possible, they might think (although such lewd and profane Persons are not much given to thinking) that the matter was not great, how, or in what manner, they took the share which belong'd to them; but God, who best knew what was pleasing to himself, saith, *The Sin of the young Men was very great before the Lord*. v. 17. For God will and ought to be served in this own Way, and they, who thought to be Wiser than his Laws, smarted for their Folly. Thus *Nadab* and *Abihu* Lev. 10. 1. (two brisk young men) had a mind to try the Experiment of offering *strange Fire before the Lord* Lev. 1. 7. ch. 6. v. 12. ch. 16. v. 12. (not taking
it

it from the Alter as God had appointed.) And what came of this Presumptuous violation of God's Law ? They were immediately consumed by a *strange Fire* themselves ; for, it is said, *A Fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord ; i. e. ch. 10. v. 2. they were struck dead with Lightning upon the Place, and their dead Bodies were carried forth from before the Sanctuary out of the Camp ; v. 4. that all the People might observe the Truth of what Moses said to Aaron on this Occasion : This is that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the People I will be glorified. v. 3.* It is true, God did not punish *Hophni* and *Phineas* in the same manner, who added great Lewdness and Immorality to their other faults ; v. 22. but he severely threatens the whole House of *Eli* for their Sins ; and as a sign of the rest, he declares, that these profligate Wretches should both be taken of the same Day ; v. 34. Which was accordingly accomplished with dreadful Circumstances ; For, *the Ark of God was taken ch. 4. v. 11. at the same time.*

(2.) That the House of *Eli* was advanced to that Dignity which it then enjoy'd by an extraordinary Method of Providence: For, when *Nadab* and *Abihu* the Sons of *Aaron* were destroy'd, their remained *Eleazer* and *Ithamar*, Lev. 10. 6. 1 Chr. 24. 2. Num. 3. 4. (for the other died Childless,) from them descended two Branches of *Aaron's* Family. *Eleazer* was of the Elder House ; but *Eli*, who descended from *Ithamar*, was in possession of the High Priesthood by God's Approbation. And when *Abiathar* in *Solomon's* time was put by the High Priesthood, it is said, *that he descended from Ithamar, 1 Chr. 14. 25. and was of the House of Eli; and he was therefore thrust out that God might fulfil his Word, which he spake concerning the House of Eli in Shiloh. 1 Kings 24. 27.* By which we find, that God had raised up the House of *Eli* after an extraordinary manner ; and no doubt, according to the Wise Methods of Divine Providence for an Extraordinary End ; and we find no ill Character fixed upon *Eli* himself, although *he had judged Israel forty years ; 1 Sam. 4. 18.* but there were those about him, and very near him, who were

loose, profane and dissolute Persons, and although, those who are most concerned, do commonly hear the last of the Miscarriages of those related to them; yet the Cry was so great that it came to his Ears, and he took notice of it, and re-
 proved them for it; *And he said to them, why do ye such things? &c.* ch. 2. v. 22, 23, 24, 25. The good old Man seems to be heartily concerned and troubled for his Sons Fol-
 lies; but this did not answer God's End; for the Reason He gives of the Heavy Judgments denounced against his Family, was, *because his Sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.* ch. 3. v. 13. God expects something more than meer Words, or bare Reproofs, where his *Honour*, and that of *Religion*, are so much concerned. But when Profaneness, Looseness, and Irreligion, crept in among them, and grew too hard for the Government, God threatens to do such a thing in Israel, *at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.* ch. 3. v. 11. I need go no farther.

(3.) That although God was justly provoked by the Sins of the House of *Eli*; yet there was a concurrence of the People Sins in bringing down such severe and astonishing Judgments. There was no great loss in *Hophni* and *Phinehas*, unless they had been better; but it was a terrible Judgment to have the *Ark of God* taken, and carried Captive; and thereby their whole Religion exposed to scorn and contempt among their Neighbours, who hated them for the sake of their Religion. For when the Idolatrous Nations about them had corrupted themselves and the Worship of God, He was pleased, by the Ministry of *Moses*, to set up a Form of Worship among the People of *Israel* according to his own Will. This gave great dissatisfaction to all their Neighbours, and encreased their Spight and Malice against them; which they were ready to shew on all Occasions; but never more than when the *Ark of God* was taken Captive and carried about in Triumph among them: for this was the *Symbol* of God's particular Presence among the People of *Israel*. The *Tabernacle*, with all its Rich and admirable Furniture, was as his Court; but the *Holy of Holies*, as his Chamber of Presence; and there the *Ark* was the Place where God gave his Answers to his

his People on great and Solemn Occasions. And what could be more grievous and dishonourable to them, than to have this *Ark of God* carried away by their Enemies ? For, then the Name of that whole Nation might have been *Ichabod*, for the *Glory was departed from Israel*. ch. 4. v. 22. But was all this merely for the Sins of *Hophni* and *Phinebas* ? No ; the punishment on that account related to the *House of Eli*; but this was a Judgment on the whole Nation : And God himself gives a sad Account of it, but it was such, as reached to the Nature and Extent of the Judgment. Go ye now, saith God in the Prophet *Jerimiab*, unto my place which was in *Shiloh*, where I set my Name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my People *Israel*. Jer. 7. 12. So that here was a Complication of the Sins of all sorts to bring down so heavy a Judgment upon them.

And thus I have endeavour'd to clear the way towards the right apprehending the full Scope and Design of these Words, *Them that honour me I will honour ; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed*. Wherein are two things to be spoken to ;

I. The Nature of that Honour which is due to God,

II. The Rules and Measures whereby God bestows Honour on Mankind, *Them that honour me I will honour ; and they that despise me, &c.*

(1.) The Nature of that Honour which is due to God.

There are three sorts of Men to be consider'd with Respect to the Honour due to God ;

(1.) Such as despise him instead of honouring him.

(2.) Such as pretend to Honour him but do not.

(3.) Such as give him that real Honour which is due to him.

(1.) There are such as despise him instead of honouring him. Such as the Sons of *Eli* here mention'd, who are said to be the Sons of *Belial*, who knew not the Lord. 1 Sam. 2. 12. A strange Character of such, who had not only the general Advantages of the People of *Israel* to know God above all Nations of the World ; but a particular Obligation to serve and Worship him ! But those do not know God who despise his

Service. It is impossible to *despise* Infinite Goodness and Power and Wisdom; for those are things, which all that understand them cannot but Reverence and highly Esteem. For a poor Creature to despise his Creatour; or one that lives upon the Bounty of another to despise his Benefactour, seems to be such an Inconsistency in Morality, as if humane Nature were incapable of it. But notwithstanding, God himself, who knows the most secret thoughts of Mens Hearts, saith here, *They that despise me shall be lightly esteemed*; Although God cannot be despised for his glorious Perfections; yet his Authority may be despised, when Men presumptuously break his Laws; when they do not regard what he hath Commanded or forbidden; *When they profess to know God, but in Works they deny him*; Tit. I. 16. when they own a God, and yet live as if there were none; giving themselves over to a profane and irreligious Temper of Mind, if not to all sorts of Wickedness in their Lives. And if once such a Temper prevails, there is nothing to be expected but an Inundation of the other. For those who despise God and Religion can have little Regard to the Differences of good and Evil; and when once the Awe of God and Conscience is gone, there is nothing can be effectual enough to restrain the violence of Natural Inclinations.

There are two sorts of Profane Persons too easie to be observed in the World. Some are Profane in their Practices; who give way to their Sensual Inclinations and pursue them, as they see Occasion, without Reflection or Consideration. These do not presently shake off the Principles of Religion and Virtue, although they Act against them, They know they ought to *Fear God and to Abstain from Evil*; but they do neither, leading a loose, dissolute, and wicked Life although if they would but consider what they do, they might soon be convinced of the Folly of their Actions; because they Act against those Principles which they have seen no Reason to question, but they have not the Grace and Resolution to Observe them. While they continue thus, there is some hold to be taken of them; and although their Sins be against Conscience, yet they are not past Hope; because there is some life left, but under great Strugglings and Decays.

But

But there are others (I wish I could only say there had been) who are *Profane* out of *Principles*; who not only *Neglect* Religion, but *Despise* it; and *Affront* and *Ridicule* it, as far as they dare with regard to their own Safety. The other are Mischievous to the World by *Example*, but these by *Design*; Those are Enemies to themselves and to such as follow them; but these ought to be look'd on, as the Subverters of all that is Good, And the Promoters of all Evil and Mischief and therefore as the truest *Enemies to Mankind*, and *the Pest and Bane* of Humane Society; The Dishonour and Reproach of their Age and Country; And not merely Enemies to Mankind, but to God himself, the best and wisest Being in the World; whom as far as in them lies, they endeavour to Dethrone from his Sovereignty over it. And where such *Monsters of Impiety* grow numerous and bold, they bode the most fatal Consequences to such a People, where they appear without a Publick Detestation of them.

(2.) There are such who pretend to *Honour* God, but do not. *Honour* is an Act of the Mind, (if it be spoken of real and inward *Honour*, and not of the external Signs of it) and it is in Him that gives, and not in him that receives it. But yet those who intend to give *Honour* to a another, may do it in such an improper and unsuitable manner, that He for whom it is intended, may look on it as an Affront and dishonour to him. Therefore he that would give true *Honour* to another must have a just Apprehension of his Worth and Excellency, and give it in such a manner as is most becoming and agreeable to him.

Now, there are two ways whereby Men may be guilty of dishonouring God under a pretence of Honouring him.

(1.) By entertaining false Notions of God in their minds, and Worshipping their own Imaginations instead of Him.

(2.) By doing Honour to Him, not according to his Nature and Will, but according to their own Intentions and Imaginations.

(1.) By false Notions of God in their minds, and by Worshipping their own Imaginations instead of him; i. e. when Persons form in their minds false Imaginations or Con-

ceptions of Him ; and so give their Worship not to the true God, but to an Idol of their own Fancy. But there is a great deal of difference between such Conceptions of God in our Minds, which fall short of the Perfections of the divine Nature, (as all ours must do for want of Faculties to comprehend him) and such which attribute something to him which is unworthy of him. Nor, that if any happen to be mistaken in their Conceptions of God, we must presently charge them with Idolatry ; for the Scripture makes that to lie in an open and publick dishonouring of God, by giving that Worship which is alone due to him, to any thing besides himself ; It is the setting up of another Interest among mankind in opposition to his Power and Sovereignty ; It is such an Exposing the proper Object of divine Worship as to render it mean and contemptible : for nothing can be a greater disparagement to the divine Nature, than to be supposed to be like the Work of mens hands ; or to have any of his own Creatures to have that Worship given to them which belongs to himself ; And so it takes away the due Apprehension, which ought to be always maintained of the Infinite distance between God and the Workmanship of his Hands. But these consequences do no reach to inward false Conceptions of God ; yet they ought by all possible means to be avoided by those who would give unto God in their minds the Honour which is due unto him. And to avoid all wrong Apprehensions concerning him, we must settle in our minds such a fixed Notion of him, as results from those Evidences which prove his Being. For, *the invisible things of God saith the Apostle, are understood by things that are made ;* Rom. 1. 20. *i. e.* the visible frame of the World doth afford such plain Evidence of the Wisdom, Power, and goodness of the maker of them, that from thence we may form a distinct and clear Notion of God in our minds, as a Being Infinitely Wise, Powerful and good. This is the most natural, easy, and orderly Conception we can have of God in our minds ; because it arises from the same Arguments, which prove his Being. And when our minds are fixed and settled herein, the next thing is to exclude all mean and unworthy Thoughts of him, as inconsistent with his divine Perfections. There-
fore,

fore, whatever favours of Impotency or Cruelty; whatever tends to abate our Reverence, to lessen our Esteem, to damp our Affections, or to cool our Devotion towards him, cannot be agreeable to those just Conceptions we ought to have always in our Minds concerning him. For the *Honour* of God doth not lie in having such terrible Apprehensions of his Majesty and Power and Justice as may drive us into Horrour and Despair; but in entertaining such an Opinion of his Wisdom, Goodness and Loving kindness as may incline us to Love him and to Trust in his Mercy. And then God is truly honoured by us, when we preserve a deep Sense and Awe of him upon our Minds; When we Adore him for his Infinite Perfections; when we Esteem him as the most proper Object of our Love, as well as of our Fear; When we put our Trust and Confidence in him, and depend upon him as to the Conveniencies of this Life and the Happiness of another; when *the desire of our Soul is towards him*, and our Meditation of him is frequent and serious and delightful to us; when *we set him always before us*, and direct the Course of our Lives and Actions to the Pleasing him; When we dare not wilfully do any thing to offend him; but make it our chief study and business to do what tends to his Honour, and to promote it in the World.

It is therefore of very great Consequence, as to the whole Course of Religion to keep up in our Minds, such a true and settled Notion of God, as may influence our Devotion, reform our Disorders, inflame our Affections, and keep us from being led aside by the violent and impetuous Heats of Imagination. For this the true Source of most of the Extravagancies of Mankind about Religion; They have no true Notion of God in their Minds but they dread his Power, and know not how to please him; and so run from one thing to another, through the several Methods of Superstitions, or Enthusiasm, as agrees best with their Fancies; which is so unstable and uncertain a Principle, that no steady Course of Religion can be steer'd by it. A Man who Acts by Imagination, is like a Ship at Sea without Anchor or compass, which Rools up and down just as the Wind and the Waves carry her. But Reason

son and Understanding is a steady and uniform Principle, and being well fixed from a due and thorough Consideration of the Nature and will of God, keeps the Mind even and constant, and goes on its Course as well as it can, and makes its way, notwithstanding the Force of the Current and Tide of Natural Inclination be against it; and that the Clouds and Vapors of Imagination often hinder the Freedom of its Motion. Nothing is so uncomfortable, nothing so ungovernable as a restless Imagination; and when it is oppressed with a Religious Melancholy, then every thing seems dark and confused; we neither know God nor our selves as we ought to do, and we must judge amiss when we judge by such a false Light: And therefore our wisest course in such a case is to be Humble and Patient; to suspend any Peremptory Judgment as to our selves till we have clearer Light, and those Mists and Vapors are dispersed, which darken and perplex our Thoughts.

(2.) Men *dishonour* God, when they pretend to *honour* him, not according to his Will, but their own Intentions and Imaginations. There are some things practised and defended in the Christian World, which one would hardly think possible to have ever prevailed, had it not been that they thought to do Honour to God by them. I shall not insist upon the pretences in the Church of *Rome* of *Honouring God* against his Will, by giving divine and Religious Worship to Images, Saints and Angels, &c. because though there be a great deal of Folly and Superstition, and real Dishonour to God in them, yet there is no such mischief to the rest of mankind, unless they take up an Imagination that God will be honoured by rooting out and destroying all such as cannot comply with them in their Superstitious Follies. But as the true Spirit of Religion wears off, that of Persecution often comes in the place of it, like Wasps and Hornets out of a dead Carcass. Thus in the *Jewish Church* in our Saviour's time, there was the same outward shew and Pomp of Religion, which had been in their best times; and our Saviour himself frequented both the Synagogue Worship and the Solemn Festivals at the Temple; Luk. 4. 16. nay he allow'd that the scribes and Pharisees *sate in Moses's Chair*, Mat. 23. 2. and that his Disciples should observe what

what they taught agreeable to the Law; but yet, he elsewhere charges them that by their Traditionary Doctrines they had enervated the Force of the Law; and therefore *they did honour him with their Lips, but their Hearts was far from him*; Mat. 15. 8. i. e. they had no true Love of God or their Neighbour, but they thought to make amends for all that, by a wonderful Zeal for their own Traditions and the lesser things of the Law; which they shewed not only by an unwearied diligence to gain Profelytes, but by destroying all such as opposed their Designs; and that not in ordinary way of Passion and Revenge, but they would needs have all this to be done for the Honour and Service of God. *Whoever killeth you will think he doth God service.* Job. 16. 2. A strange kind of Service indeed, to take away the Lives of his best and most useful *Servants*! But although no Religion in the World be so directly contrary to all Acts of Cruelty and inhumanity as the Christian is, yet upon the Degeneracy of that, the same kind of Spirit hath risen up and prevailed over too great a part of the Christian World. But especially the very same Jewish Spirit of Zeal and Hypocrisy and Cruelty had enter'd in these last Ages into a Society of Men (whom I need not Name) who have undermined the genuine Principles of Morality, inflamed the Spirits of Princes to all the Effects of a Cruel War and a Merciless Persecution; and used their utmost Endeavours to root out all such as dare not Sacrifice their Consciences to the Will of a Prince under their direction: And which adds to all this, they have the Impudence to assume that Motto to themselves, *Ad majorem Dei Gloriam*; as though they aimed at nothing but doing greater Honour to God. Such as these go beyond *Hophni* and *Phinehas*; for their Wickedness, although great, was confined to a narrow Compass, but these disperse themselves into all States and Kingdoms, and carry on the same uniform Design, *viz.* to do all the Mischief they can under the pretence of Advancing the Honour of God.

(3.) But certainly there is a way left to give to God that Honour which is due to Him; otherwise, it were to little purpose to say, *Them that honour me will I honour.* But I shall not take in here all the Ways how we may Honour God, but consider that which is most proper to the Design of these Words. For which we are to observe, that the External Worship and Service of God was in general, well enough kept up and observed in the Tabernacle at *Shiloh*. There the High Priest attended, the Daily Sacrifices were offer'd, and the People resorted thither at the Solemn Feasts from all parts of the Land: But the great Examples of Wickedness in the Sons of *Eli* had spread themselves so far, that the People were generally corrupted, and the best Part of their Religion, which lies in a Reformation of Manners, was almost gone. There were some Pious and Devout Persons, such as *Eli* himself (a Good Man but a bad Magistrate, being Remiss and Careless in the Execution of his Office) and no doubt, many among the People, as well as *Elkanah* and *Hannah*, were devout and serious in the Service of God, and other Duties of Religion; but yet God himself takes notice of the Wickedness of his People *Israel*, at the time when the Ark was removed from *Shiloh*. And therefore we have Reason to take particular Notice of that Passage to *Eli*, concerning the Reason

Reason of the Punishment of his House, *Because his Sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not.* For, their Sins were of a very Contagious Nature, and by *not restraining them*, the People were run into a great degree of Looseness and Profaneness. So that it was not for *Eli's* Personal Miscarriages, that God thought himself so *dishonoured* by him, but for want of taking due Care for the suppressing Profaneness and Corruption or Manners in others. And this shews the true way how God may and ought to be *Honoured* by those who are bound to take Care of others; *viz.* by giving all Encouragement to true Religion and Vertue, and by making use of the most effectual Means for suppressing Irreligion and Profaneness.

And this indeed is a great and *Noble Design* fit for the greatest Minds and Persons of the highest Station to be Employed about. I cannot deny, that it is a Difficult Work; for it is easier to subdue the Bodies than the Passions of Men; and how many will rather venture their Lives than mortify their Lusts? And let them pretend what thy will, we find that they will sooner part with any thing than with their Sins. Do we not daily see that they will let go Honour, Reputation, Interest, Health, and the hopes of Heaven, rather than those Vices they have been accustomed to the Practice of? How can we then imagine, that the meer Fears of the Execution of Humane Laws should presently restrain those, whom no Fear of Hell or Damnation could hitherto Reform? But yet a stop may, and ought to be put to the insolent Growth of Profaneness; for if it be suffered to be too hard for our Laws, it will in time be too hard for all sort of Government. Yet how shall a stop be put to it under such Difficulties? For it cannot be denied, that we have Excellent Laws against Vice and Debauchery, and that Magistrates have had sufficient countenance from Authority for the due Execution of them. But yet the complaints are great of a mighty overflowing of all sorts of Wickedness still among us; I hope they are not all true; but yet I am afraid, there is too much ground for them. What is the Reason of such a complaint of Profaneness and Irreligion among us at a time we pretend so much to Reformation? It is no wonder that the bad Examples of those who ought to Reform others bring Vice into Fashion; but when that cannot be alledged, what is the Reason that good Examples do so little towards the *Reforming* others? It is easie to resolve all into the Corruption of Humane Nature; but that is a general Answer which serves for all Times and Places, and must suppose them alike: And if it be a good and sufficient Answer, it is to little purpose to talk of *Laws, Religion and Reformation*: For unless they may have some Power to alter and amend the course of Mens actions, they signify very little to the real Benefit of Mankind, no more than *Sea-Marks* do towards hindring the course of the Tide; But meer Examples, although of excellent use to all Ingenious Minds, yet to others they are but like *Statues of Mercury* in the Road, which point to the right way but Men will go which way they please notwithstanding.

Therefore to *Laws and Examples* the Magistrates Power must be added, which was appointed for this purpose, to be *Terrour to those that do evil*, Rom. 13. 3. as well as an Encouragement to those that do well. And then the

the Apostle supposeth *the Sword is born in vain*, ver. 4. when the Magistrate is not *the Minister of God* in this respect; a *Revenger to Execute Wrath upon him that doeth evil*. It was the great and Just Honour of Princes of old, that by their means, Mankind was reduced from a rude and disorderly kind of Life, to the Practice of Civility and Good Manners; and it is as great a Foundation of Honour still, when Men are so much Apostatized from them, to bring them back again to the due Order and Decency of Living. The Case is much harder of those who are Degenerate under Laws, than of those who were so without them; For they have learnt to dispise their Remedy, and by Arts and Subtilties to avoid the Force of that, which was intended for their Good.

But, however, none ought to be discouraged from so Excellent a Design; which Recommends it self to all Wise and Good Men, and will never want the Assistance and Prayers of all that are so; and God himself will in an especial Manner give Honour to Those who thus Honour him in his own Way; by using the most *Effectual* Means for the Reforming the Manners of Men.

But what are those ways which may be called *Effectual*? It's true, that depends upon the Favour and Blessing of God; but it is no hard Matter for us to judge what are the most likely Means to be *Effectual*. Such as,

(1.) An Universal Discountenancing of all sorts of Vice and Profaneness, be the Persons of what Rank or Quality soever. For, if those of the *House of Eli* be suffer'd to transgress, the People will follow their Examples; although the Good Old Man did not like their Doings, but he did not take Care enough to *Refrain* them.

(2.) An Even, Steady, Vigorous and Impartial Execution of the Laws against Looseness and Debauchery; so that it may not look like a sudden Heat or Design of Popularity, but proceeding from a due and well-temper'd Zeal for God and Religion.

(3.) A Wise Choice of fit Instruments to pursue so Good an End; I mean such as *Jethro* recommended to *Moses*, *Men of Courage and Integrity, Fearing God and hating Covetousness*. Exod. 18. 21. And such I hope are to be found in the several Parts of the Nation.

(4.) Lastly, A diligent Inspection into the Behaviour of those who are the proper and immediate Instruments for carrying on so good a Design. For, if there be no Inspection afterwards, it will be look'd on as a meer matter of Form, or an Order given out to satisfy the Importunities of some and the Clamours of others. It were to be wished, that all who are Employ'd in such a Work had an Equal Mixture of *Wisdom* and *Zeal*; but it is not possible to hinder some from having unequal shares of these; And it is great Pity so Good a Cause should Miscarry through the Indiscretion of any who are Zealous for it. On the other side, It is possible that some who pretend to an equal Zeal for it in general, may Use such Artifices and Fair Pretences, as may effectually baffle and undermine it, while they seem to be concerned to promote it. So that, what through the Intemperate Hearts of some, the Coldness and Indifferency of others, and the certain Averseness all bad Men have to any real Design of *Reformation*, there

is a necessity for such an Affair to be often look'd into, and an Account taken of the management of it, if any great Advantage be expected by it.

And surely no greater Advantage can be expected as to this World, than from such a Design managed, as it ought to be. For what can we propose to our Selves, that can tend more to promote the Honour of *Almighty God*, which we ought above all other things to be concerned for. For, *the Righteous God loveth Righteousness* and he *abhors all kind of Wickedness*; What then can be more Pleasing to him, than to have all sorts of Impiety and Profaneness discountenanced, punished, and if it be possible, rooted out? What can tend more to the Honour of his *Viceroyents*, than to shew so much of a Resemblance to Him, as to love what God Loves, and to hate what he hates; and to imploy their Power for the same End which God himself doth his, *viz.* to Advance his Glory and to do Good to mankind? What can tend more to the Honour of our *Church and Nation*, than to let the World see by such Good Works as these, what the *Reformation* is, which we aim at; Not meerly of some disputable Points, as to Doctrine and Practice, which we have earnestly contended for, and with great Reason,) but a true and serious *Reformation* of the Hearts and Lives of Men; without which all our other Pretences will fall infinitely short of what God expects from us, and the very Name of *Reformation* will be a Reproach to us.

II. I now proceed to the second Particular, *viz.* the Rules and Measures which God observes in distributing Honour among Men, *Them that honour me, I will honour; but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*

Which may be understood two ways;

I. As to the Societies of Men which have one Common Interest.

II. As to the Interests and Honour of Particular Persons.

I. As to such Societies of Men, which have one Common Interest. And so it implies, that the Welfare and Reputation, and flourishing Condition of such, depends upon their Zeal and Concernment for God and Religion. But here, we meet very great Difficulties; for *Reason and Experience* seem to contradict each other about it. On the one side, it seems most agreeable to the Justice of Divine Providence to Reward and punish those in this World who will not be capable of being rewarded or punished in another; so there will be no communities in another World. But on the other side, we cannot deny matter of common Experience; for, how long have the *Turkish and Papal Monarchies* (to name no other) flourished, when the *seven Churches of Asia*, and the *Churches of Africa* have been long since destroyed? How strangely hath *Mahometism* spread in the *Eastern Parts* of the World? And what a Check hath there been, upon the *Reformation* in these *Western Parts*? With what a mighty Torrent did it prevail at first? Then it stood at a stand, and hath of late Years gone so much backward and suffer'd so very much in many Parts of it: And yet we think, and that very justly, that the Honour of God is concerned in all this. What shall we say to the Insolent Oppressors of mankind who make no Conscience of ruining Cities and Countries, and offering Violence to the Bodies and Consciences of men to Advance and Support their own Grandeur; and

and yet have been suffer'd to prevail so far as to be made an Argument against Providence by Atheistical men? It is to be hoped that God in his own time will vindicate his *Honour* and clear this point to the Satisfaction of all reasonable Men; but yet we cannot penetrate into the Wisdom and Secrets of Providence. God will (no doubt) take Care of his own *honour*; but he is not bound to give such men an Account of the Ways and methods and Seasons of his doing it. He often raises up a Nation fit for his purpose, and makes them as a Scourge to Neighbour Nations; and when they have done his Work, he suffers them to be humbled, if not destroyed, by the same methods they have used to others. Sometimes he raises up one Kingdom and Nation against another, when their Sins make them ripe for Vengeance; and so he takes the Portheards of the Earth and Breaks them upon one another; and thus, by their mutual Punishment, they both become the Executioners of his Wrath; and we cannot determine by the Event which was in the greater Guilt. So that God takes Care of his own *Honour*, by methods we are not able to comprehend. For who can weigh the Nations in a Balance, and determine how far the Sins of one doth exceed the other? And if we cannot know the Number and Aggravation of a People Sins, we can never fix the measures and Degrees of their Punishment.

But, however, some things are certain;

(1.) That the Sins of a Nation do naturally tend to the Weakness and Dishonour of it. Thus a factious, seditious, turbulent Temper, not only is the Reproach of a People; but the ready way to destroy it. And yet it hath so happen'd, that when the Factions have been almost equally poised, as at *Rome* and *Carthage*, they have raised such an Emulation between them, which by their endeavours to out-vie each other, hath for some time preserved their Country. Who can deny that Luxury and Debauchery, and all sorts Intemperance, not only sink the Reputation of a People, but effeminates and softens them, and makes them Careless and Idle, Regardless of any thing but what makes for their own Ease and Voluptuousness? And in all humane probability, such a Nation must sink, when a People of more Wisdom and Courage and Resolution, makes it their business to overcome them. So that these sorts of Sins are *Natural Causes* of weakening the Power and Interest of a Nation. But there are other Sins, as Profaneness and Contempt of God and Religion, Hypocrisy, Idolatry, &c. and of such which Work as *Moral Causes*, God himself is the only Judge, when the measure of their Iniquity is filled up.

(2.) Sometimes God steps out of his Ordinary method and Course of Providence, either in a way of Judgment or Mercy. And then he more particularly shows, that *those that Honour him, he will honour*; and *those who despise him shall be lightly esteemed*. These things are not every days Experience, but when they do happen they deserve to be taken Notice of, in a more than ordinary Manner. *Aristotle* *Eudem.* l. 7. c. 14. who was no great Friend to Providence. as to Humane Affairs, professes, that he did not know what to make of the extraordinary Success some Persons had in their Affairs, without any extraordinary visible Cause. It is possible, he might have the Success of his Macedonian Friends in his Thoughts; who swallow'd up

the *Common wealths* of Greece, as so many Morfels, and then destroy'd the mighty *Perſian Monarchy*. But in theſe Caſes, he allows a *Divine Impulſe*, carrying them on beyond the ordinary Meaſures of humane Prudence; and overruling ſo many things in Order to Succeſs, as nothing but a Divine Hand could manage. And when great Advantages come to a Nation in ſuch a manner, a more than ordinary Degree of Thankfulneſs is juſtly expected, that God may be *honoured* in a particular manner for the Deliverance his Works by ſuch Means, and the Mercies he beſtows or continues thereby.

(2.) As to particular Perſon; how far thiſholds, will appear by theſe things.

(1.) That Eſteem and Honour natrally follows the Opinion of another's Deſert or Excellency. For it is not an Arbitrary thing, but is founded on the Suppoſition of ſomething that deſerves it. It is like the Aſſent given to Mathematical Evidence, which is not becauſe they will do it, but becauſe they cannot help it.

(2.) The Sincere Praiſe of Piety and Vertue doth command Eſteem and Reverence. Hypocriſy indeed leſſens it to the utmoſt degree; becauſe it argues a mean and falſe Temper of Mind; but there is nothing in true Religion but what tends to raiſe eſteem. For it implies all the things which are ſto-
w'd by all Perſons to gain Honour among Men. For one that is truly Religious is a true Lover of God and of Mankind; He is grateful to his Benefactor, and always owns in the moſt ſolemn manner his Dependence upon him, both by Prayers and Praiſes; He is ready to do Good to all Men, as far as is conſiſtent with his Duty to God; He is juſt, righteous, and merciful, ſober and temperate in the whole Courſe of his Life; He acts not by chance, or for by Ends; but by a fixed Principle of being and doing Good; he keeps himſelf within the Bounds which God hath ſet him; and with Cheerfulneſs and Reſolution ſets himſelf to do and ſuffer his Will; and hath ſo much Courage, as to dare to do his Duty, and is afraid of nothing ſo much as offending God. And now let any one judge, whether there be any thing Mean or Contem-
ptible in all this; whether every one that bears this Character doth not wiſh it beſonged to himſelf. And that is a certain token that it brings Honour and Eſteem with it.

Let me then, for a Conclusion of all, Recommend the Praiſe of Religion and Vertue to all ſuch as are the moſt concerned for Honour and Eſteem. The World is always vain enough to flatter Greatneſs, either out of weakneſs or Deſign; but true Greatneſs of Mind diſpises Flattery; and where that is wanting in any, this very Flatterer deſpises them. But this is the Way to be above the reach of Contempt, *To do Juſtly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with God*; Micah. 6. 8. and theſe are the things which God himſelf aſſures us are the main Parts of our Duty. If we be Careleſs of God's Honour and Service now the time will ſhortly come, when we ſhall heartily wiſh we had been otherwiſe. For, how great ſoever your honour be now, you and that together, muſt in a little time be *laid in the Duſt*. And the main Difference will be according to the honour we have done to God. For, although the Text doth hold good, as to this World, as I have already ſhew'd; yet the moſt glorious Accompliſhment of it will be in the Liſt to come: For, then it will be made Evident to all Mankind, that *Thoſe that honour him, God will honour; and they that deſpiſe him ſhall be lightly eſteemed*.

FINIS.

